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Is Islamic Rationalism of Greek Origin?

A Historical Study

Achmad Khudori Soleh*

Abstract

Ernest Renan and Leon Gauthier claimed that Islam lacks rationality and that Islamic philosophy is a plagiarism of Greek thought. This study aims to achieve two objectives: first, to reject the conclusions of Renan and Gauthier, and second, to demonstrate that Islamic rationalism originates from Islam itself. Conducted as a historical study, the research draws on literature from both books and journals. The results show that Islamic philosophy does not originate from Greece for three reasons: (a) historical evidence indicates that Greek philosophy entered the Islamic tradition only after the rational thought of the Mu'tazila had been established and institutionalized as the official state doctrine; (b) historically, many Muslim thinkers did not accept Greek philosophy; and (c) Muslim philosophers developed concepts that differ fundamentally from Greek philosophical teachings. Furthermore, Islamic rationalism emerges from Islam itself through (a) the rationalisation of the Arabic language, (b) the rational methods of deriving Islamic jurisprudence

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(*fiqh*), and (c) the rationalisation of theological thought. Based on these findings, this study rejects the conclusions of Renan and Gauthier, asserting that their claims regarding Islamic rationalism and philosophy lack a valid evidential basis.

Keywords: *language rationalization, theological rationalism, method of determining Islamic jurisprudence, Ernest Renan, Leon Gauthier.*

Introduction

Ernest Renan (1823-1892), a French orientalist, claimed that Islam does not have rationality or philosophy. For Renan, Islamic philosophy is not from Islam but rather an imitation of Greek philosophy, especially Aristotle (384-322 BC). In line with that, a French writer, Leon Gauthier (1862-1949), claimed that Islam does not have a philosophy. For Gauthier, Islamic philosophy is Arabic, written by Arabs who quote Neoplatonic philosophical thoughts.¹

Researchers reject the statements of the two Orientalists. Greek philosophy that entered Islamic thought through translation has encouraged the development of Islamic philosophy to become increasingly rapid. However, this does not indicate that rational thought and Islamic philosophy are a plagiarism of Greek philosophy. Louis Gardet (1904-1986), Abed al-Jabiri (1936-2010), and Oliver Leaman (b. 1950) stated that it is a big mistake to assume

that Islamic rationalism originated from translations of Greek texts or that Islamic philosophy is an excerpt from Greek philosophy.²

Very few studies have examined Renan and Gautier's thoughts about Islam. The researcher's search for Renan (1823-1892) in Mendeley only found three articles. Namely, (1) Annemarie's research on Renan's views on Islam. For Renan, Islam is a religion that does not recognise rationality and philosophy. Ibn Rushd, Renan considered to have achieved extraordinary rational philosophy because he was not a Muslim; even Ibn Rushd's rational nature was his resistance to Islam.³ (2) Marenbon's research on Renan's views on Ibn Rushd. This research shows that Renan was wrong in assessing Ibn Rushd, or at least there was a misinterpretation of Ibn Rushd.⁴ (3) Othman's research on Renan's views on Islam and its influence on orientalist studies.⁵

Meanwhile, no research on Islam exists on Gauthier (1862-1949). The researcher only found three short articles by George Sarton reviewing three of Gauthier's writings and translations. Namely, (1) Gauthier's book on Ibn Rushd, written based on Renan's views,⁶ (2) Gauthier's translation of Hayy ibn Yaqzan by Ibn Tufail (1105-1185),⁷ and (3) Gauthier's book on Aristotle's metaphysics, written in Arabic philosophy.⁸

This study aims for three things. (1) Rejecting Renan and Gauthier's views on Islamic rationalism above. (2) Showing that Renan and Gauthier's views are baseless. (3) Showing that Islamic rational thought comes from Islam itself, not from Greek philosophy or a plagiarism of Greek philosophy. Based on this, this study at least makes three contributions. (1) Providing historical data that Islamic rationalism comes from Islam itself. (2) Providing data on the logic of early Arabic language development, the method of establishing Islamic law, and the theological thinkers in Islam marks the beginning of the development of rationalism in Islam. (3) Providing historical data that Greek philosophy can enter the Islamic tradition through translation because of the existence of rational thought established in Islam.

Literature Review

1.1 Damascus Polemic

When the Caliph Muawiyah (661-680) established Damascus as the capital of the Umayyad government (661-750), in Damascus at that time, there had been a fierce religious polemic between the Syrian Christians and the Magians. Their polemic was related to the concept of good and evil. Namely, about the basics of something being considered good or bad, indicators of good and evil, and the consequences of good and bad behaviour. With the arrival of

Muslims, the parties involved in the polemics increased and became fierce.

Louis Gardet (1904-1986) stated that polemic material also increased with the arrival of Muslims. They not only polemicized about the concept of good and evil but also about other theological issues. Namely, (1) about human actions. Do humans have the freedom to determine their behaviour so that they deserve rewards or punishments? Or do humans not have the freedom to act because God is the one who has the power to determine everything? (3) About the Qur'ān, is it created (*hādīth*) or uncreated (*qadīm*)? According to Gardet, monk John of Damascus (675–749) was the first to raise this third polemic for a specific purpose.⁹

In addition, Muslim theologians are required to explain and reconcile Qur'ānic teachings that appear, at first glance, to be contradictory. For instance, the Qur'ān affirms that Allah is transcendent and free from all human attributes (*tanzīh*), yet it also contains verses that ascribe to Him attributes resembling those of created beings (*tashbīh*), such as having hands or being established upon the Throne ('Arsh). Likewise, the Qur'ān portrays Allah as the Most Merciful, while also describing Him as severe in punishment towards His servants. Muslim theologians of this period sought to address these challenges through reasoned argumentation. They developed

systematic frameworks of rational thought and critical methodologies aimed at producing sound and logically defensible conclusions. Their efforts were informed by an earlier engagement with Greek philosophy, which they had become acquainted with through translation.¹⁰

1.2 Translation of Greek Philosophy.

Several sources indicate that Greek works began to be translated into Arabic as early as the Umayyad Caliphate (661–750). However, Philip Hitti (1886–1978) observed that the systematic translation of Greek philosophical texts into Arabic took place during the reign of Caliph al-Ma'mūn (813–833) of the Abbasid Caliphate (750–1258). Among the most renowned translators of that period were Yūḥannā ibn Māsawaih (777–857) and Ḥunayn ibn Ishāq (808–873). Consequently, Abed al-Jābirī (1935–2010) regarded this translation movement as marking the initial encounter between Greek philosophy and Islamic rational thought.¹¹

Montgomery Watt (1909–2006) observed that the Greek philosophical works translated into Arabic originated from diverse sources and languages. Some translators rendered them from Syriac intermediaries, while others—such as Ḥunayn ibn Ishāq (808–873)—translated directly from Greek manuscripts. Consequently, Muṣṭafā al-Ghurābī noted that many Arabic translations of Greek

philosophy were influenced by the Neo-Platonic thought prevalent among Syrian Christians.

Caliph al-Ma'mūn (813–833), who initiated the translation of Greek philosophy into Arabic, was deeply interested in philosophy and rational inquiry. Having adopted the rationalist theology of the Mu'tazila, which was prominent at the time, he even established it as the official theological doctrine of the state. To satisfy his intellectual and scientific aspirations, al-Ma'mūn not only commissioned the translation of Greek philosophical works but also organised scholarly missions to neighbouring regions to acquire books of knowledge deemed valuable for translation and development within the Islamic tradition.¹²

Method

This study is a historical investigation focusing on the origins of rationalism and philosophy in Islam. The data are derived from literary sources, including books and scholarly journals, which the researcher categorises into primary, secondary, and general sources. The primary sources consist of works that directly examine the emergence of rational thought in Islam, particularly those authored by recognised authorities in the field. The secondary sources comprise literature that supports or provides context to the primary materials, while the general sources include theoretical or contextual

references relevant to the topic. Primary sources serve as the main corpus of data, with secondary and general sources functioning as supplementary materials.

The collected data were analysed using content analysis, enabling the researcher to interpret and explain the development of rational thought and philosophy in Islam. To minimise potential misinterpretations of the primary sources, cross-checking was employed. This process involved verifying the data by comparing it with other primary materials or relevant secondary sources addressing the same subject.¹³

The researcher subsequently presented the study's findings through an interpretative analysis approach. In this phase, the researcher critically examined the origins of rationalism and philosophy in Islam by tracing their historical foundations, anticipating their logical implications, and comparing them with other relevant theories through comparative analysis. Based on these analyses, the researcher formulated a comprehensive and meaningful conclusion.

Results

This section addresses two principal themes:

- (a) It refutes the views of Ernest Renan (1823–1892) and Léon Gauthier (1862–1949) on three grounds: first, that Greek

philosophy did not penetrate the Islamic tradition during its formative period; second, that many Muslims rejected Greek philosophical thought; and third, that Muslim philosophers developed their own distinctive intellectual frameworks.

(b) It argues that Islamic rationalism originated within Islam itself, supported by three lines of evidence: the early rationalisation of the Arabic language, the evolution of Islamic legal methodology, and the theological debates that arose within the Islamic intellectual tradition.

1. Rejecting Ernest and Gauthier.

1.1 Coming Later

The translations of Greek philosophical works undeniably exerted a considerable influence on the development of Islamic philosophical thought. However, this influence does not imply that Islamic philosophy originated from Greek philosophy. As Louis Gardet (1904–1986), Abed al-Jābirī (1936–2010), and Oliver Leaman (b. 1950) have asserted, it is a serious misconception to consider Islamic philosophy merely as a derivative or excerpt of Greek philosophy.¹⁴ Three fundamental reasons support this view.

First, it is possible for different thinkers to engage with similar themes without one necessarily influencing the other. Moreover, a thinker may explore comparable subjects or even draw upon earlier

ideas while still maintaining the originality of their own theoretical framework. For instance, Aristotle (384–322 BC), though a student of Plato (427–348 BC), developed a philosophy that diverged from that of his teacher. Likewise, Baruch Spinoza (1632–1677), while influenced by René Descartes (1596–1650), articulated philosophical views distinct from Cartesian thought. A similar pattern can be observed among Muslim philosophers: both al-Fārābī (870–950) and Ibn Sīnā (980–1037) formulated independent philosophical systems, even though they studied and engaged deeply with Aristotelian philosophy.¹⁵

Second, Muslim philosophers lived in different beliefs, environments, and conditions from Greek philosophers, so ignoring this influence in understanding their thoughts and theories would be a serious mistake. Based on this, several points can be made regarding the transmission of Greek philosophy into Arabic in the Middle Ages:

- (1) The transmission of Greek philosophy into Islamic Arabic was a complex process that cannot be separated from the influence of existing Islamic thoughts and traditions.
- (2) Greek philosophical ideas presented by Muslim philosophers, from al-Kindī (801–878) to Ibn Rushd (1126–1198) and even Suhrawardī (1153–1191), cannot be properly understood without

reference to the contexts and circumstances surrounding these works.

- (3) Explaining Muslim works independently of Islamic cultural factors would produce an incomplete account, one that cannot capture the significant transformations that often occurred.

Thus, Islamic rationalism and philosophy developed based on Islamic values and the social conditions surrounding them, rather than merely as a transmission from Greece.¹⁶

Third, historical evidence indicates that Greek philosophy was introduced into Arabic Islam through translations during the reign of Caliph al-Ma'mūn (811–833), carried out by translators such as Yūḥannā ibn Masawaih (777–857) and Ḥunayn ibn Ishāq (808–873). By this time, rational methods of thinking had already developed extensively within Islamic society. The rational theological framework of the Mu'tazila, established by Wāṣil ibn 'Aṭā' (699–748), had become highly influential and was even adopted as the official state doctrine. Prominent Mu'tazilite scholars exerted significant influence across various Islamic regions, including 'Amr ibn 'Ubaid (d. 760), Ibrāhīm ibn Sayyār an-Nazzām (775–845), and 'Amr ibn Bahr al-Kinānī (776–868) in Basrah; Bishr ibn al-Mu tamir (d. 825) in Baghdad; Mu'ammār ibn 'Abbād (d. 830) in Medina; and Abū al- Ḥudhail ibn al- 'Allāf (752–841) in Samarra

(present-day Iraq).¹⁷ This rational theological framework of the Mu'tazila created a receptive environment for Greek philosophy within the Islamic tradition. Without this pre-existing foundation of rational thought, Greek philosophy might not have been able to take root or develop effectively in Islamic intellectual life.

1.2 Rejecting Greek Philosophy

The translation and development of Greek philosophy into Islam during the reign of Caliph al-Ma'mūn (811–833) was met with opposition. Ibn Ḥanbal (780–855) was among the first Salaf scholars to resist the integration of Greek philosophical thought. George N. Atiyeh (1923–2008) identified several reasons for this opposition:

- (1) The Salaf feared that engagement with Greek sciences might undermine Muslims' respect for religious teachings.
- (2) Historical data indicate that many individuals' studying Greek philosophy and science were non-Muslims, Magians, Sabians, or Muslims following esoteric schools, which generated suspicion regarding their intellectual pursuits.
- (3) There was a desire to protect the Muslim community from ideological influences, such as Greek philosophy, which were considered inconsistent with Islamic teachings.¹⁸

The Salaf's opposition to Greek sciences was not without reason. Some Muslim scholars who engaged deeply with philosophy later questioned and even opposed certain Islamic teachings. Notably, Ibn

al-Ṭayṭb al-Sarakhsi (833–899), a student of al-Kindī (801–873) and teacher to Caliph al-Mu'taḍid (892–902), became a denier of prophecy after his philosophical studies.¹⁹ Another notable figure is Ibn al-Rāwandī (827–911), a follower of the Mu'tazila. After studying philosophy, he rejected both prophecy and the teachings of the Sharī'a. According to Ibn al-Rāwandī, human reason alone was sufficient to discern right from wrong and good from evil, rendering prophetic guidance and religious law unnecessary.²⁰ Another prominent figure was Zakariyyā al-Rāzī (865–925), a philosopher, physician, and chemist. Al-Rāzī criticized prophecy on three grounds:

- (1) Human reason can distinguish between good and evil, as well as the useful and the harmful; thus, humans can know God and manage their lives without the need for a prophet.
- (2) There is no justification for preferring one individual over another since all people are born with the same capacity for reason.
- (3) The teachings of the prophets differ from one another; if they truly conveyed the message of the same God, such discrepancies should not exist.²¹

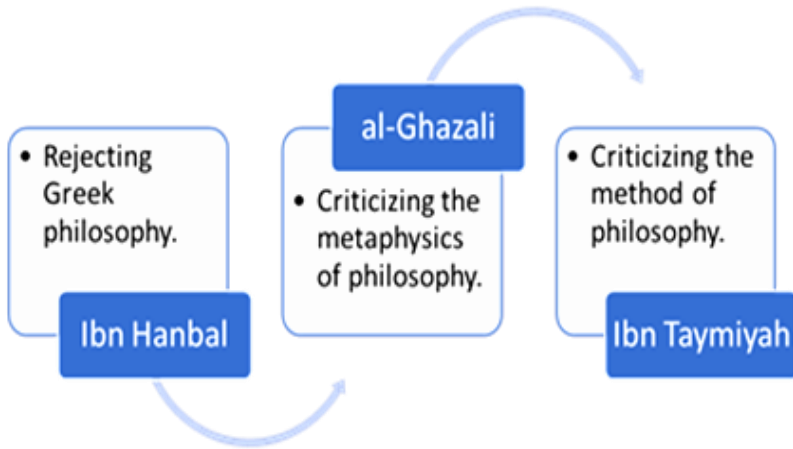
In the subsequent phase, al-Ghazālī (1058–1111) also criticised Greek philosophy. In his *Tahāfut al-Falāsifah* (The Incoherence of the Philosophers), al-Ghazālī argued that certain metaphysical

doctrines derived from Greek philosophy could lead to disbelief. These included: (1) the concept of the eternity of the world, (2) the claim that God does not possess knowledge of particular or detailed matters (*al-juz' iyyāt*), and (3) the denial of bodily resurrection.²² Al-Ghazali repeated his criticism of this philosophy in *al-Munqidh min al-Ḍalāl*.²³

A century later, Ibn Taymiyyah (1263–1328) also criticised Greek philosophy. Unlike al-Ghazālī, his critique focused not on its metaphysical content but on its methodological foundations. Ibn Taymiyyah argued that the demonstrative method (*burhānī*) of Aristotle (384–322 BC), as adopted by Muslim philosophers, was flawed and failed to yield certain knowledge. Its conclusions, he maintained, were speculative (*ẓannī*) rather than definitive (*qaṭ'ī*).²⁴

This description shows that not all Muslim scholars accepted Greek philosophy. Certain figures—such as Ibn Ḥanbal (780–855) among the Salaf, al-Ghazālī (1058–1111) among the theologians and philosophers, and Ibn Taymiyyah (1263–1328) among the jurists (*fuqahā*)—in fact rejected or at least sharply criticised it. In other words, acceptance of Greek philosophy was not universal among Muslim thinkers across various schools of thought. Hence, the claim that Islamic rationalism or philosophy was merely a derivative of Greek thought is unfounded.

Figure 1: Rejecting Greek philosophy



1.3 Different Concepts

Muslim philosophers produced the most extensive philosophical works within the Islamic intellectual tradition. Although they studied Greek philosophy, their ideas differed significantly from it. Their philosophical thought was grounded in Islamic teachings—both in subject matter, methods of reasoning, and the ultimate aims of philosophical inquiry.

First, regarding the subject of study: Greek philosophy revolves around the creation of the universe and other cosmological questions. Classical Greek philosophers such as Thales (625–545 BC), Anaximander (610–547 BC), Anaximenes (585–528 BC), Heraclitus (540–480 BC), and Empedocles (490–430 BC) all explored the origins of the cosmos. They maintained that the

universe was composed of four fundamental elements: fire, air, water, and earth.²⁵ Meanwhile, the subject of study among Muslim philosophers centred on divinity—specifically, that Allah is the Creator of the universe. Muslim philosophers such as al-Kindi (801–873), al-Farabi (870–950), and Ibn Sina (980–1037) in the East, as well as Ibn Tufail (1105–1185) and Ibn Rushd (1126–1198) in the West, all addressed the question of Allah as the Creator. However, their approach differed from that of the theologians, including the Mu'tazila, the Shi'a, and the Ash'arites.

Second concerning the method of study. Greek philosophers relied on speculation, sensory observation, and pure rational inquiry to explain their subjects of study. In contrast, Muslim philosophers employed revelation alongside reason in their philosophical investigations. They utilised rational faculties to comprehend and articulate philosophical issues while connecting their conclusions to divine revelation. No Muslim philosopher rejected revelation as a legitimate source of knowledge. Moreover, thinkers from al-Kindi (801–873) in the East to Ibn Rushd (1126–1198) in the West sought to harmonise religion and philosophy, revelation, and reason. Soleh's research highlights significant aspects of Ibn Rushd's integration of religion and philosophy, which gave rise to distinctive intellectual formulations rooted in Islam.²⁶ The Greek philosophical tradition did not incorporate this approach of integrating revelation with reason.

Third regarding the purpose of philosophy: Aristotle (384–322 BC), a prominent Greek philosopher, maintained that the goal of philosophy is to attain happiness. According to him, an individual achieves happiness by realizing and maximising their positive potential, a process cultivated through the development of a habit he termed *phronesis* (practical wisdom).²⁷ Meanwhile, al-Farabi (870–950), a Muslim philosopher, also asserted that the ultimate goal of philosophy is happiness. However, for al-Farabi, happiness is attained through knowledge of God and by guiding others toward the good.²⁸ This comparison further demonstrates that the focus of Islamic philosophy is on divinity, rather than cosmology, as in Greek philosophy.

Figure 2: Differences between Greek and Islamic Philosophy

No	Theme	Greek Philosophy	Islamic Philosophy
1.	Main Study	Cosmologies	Deity
2.	Methods	1. Speculative 2. Observation 3. Rationale	1. Revelation. 2. Rationale. 3. Integration of revelation and ratio
3.	Objective	Achieving happiness by maximizing self- positive potential through habituation (phronesis).	Achieving happiness by knowing God and guiding others to know Him.

2. Originating from Islam Itself
2.1 Originating from Language Logic

Louis Gardet (1904–1986) and George Anawati (1905–1994) argued that rational thinking in Islam did not originate from Greece but emerged from within Islam itself, particularly through Arabic logic. This development was linked to the need to understand the teachings of the Qur’ān accurately and comprehensively. Although the Qur’ān is revealed in Arabic, not all Arabs could easily grasp its full meaning. Since the time of the Khulafā’ al-Rāshidīn, the Companions recognised the necessity of interpretation and correct

recitation, a need that became increasingly pressing as more non-Arabs embraced Islam.²⁹

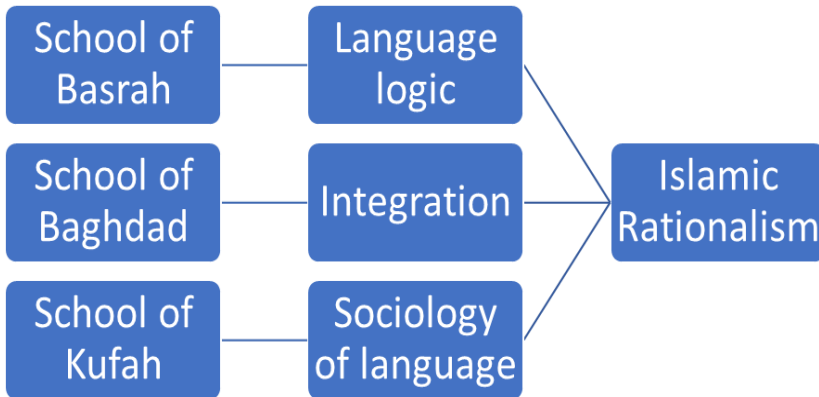
Three major linguistic schools are associated with this development. First, the Basrah school, which emphasised the rational structuring of language. Its scholars established logical rules for language and regarded any deviation from these rules as incorrect. According to some sources, the school was founded by Abū-l-Aswad ad-Du'alī (603–688) under the orders of Caliph 'Alī ibn Abī Tālib (656–661). Key figures of this school included al-Khalīl ibn Aḥmad al-Farāhīdī (718–791) and Sibawayh (760–796). Later prominent members were Ma'mār ibn Muthannā (728–825), known as Abū 'Ubaydah, and Abū Sa'īd al-Asma'ī (740–830), who lived during the reign of Caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd (785–809), followed by Abū Sa'īd al-Ḥusayn al-Sukkārī (d. 888), Abū al- 'Abbās al-Mubarrad (826–898), and Abū Bakr ibn Duraid (838–934).³⁰

Second, the Kufa school was founded by Abū Ja'far 'Alī al-Ru'āsī (d. 802). Unlike the Basrah school, which is grounded in logical principles, the Kufa school emphasises the sociology of language (samā'ī). It focuses on universal linguistic patterns and is flexible in accepting diverse rules. Language development, according to this school, can draw on unconventional usage to establish new linguistic norms. Prominent figures of the Kufa school include al-Mufaḍḍal al-

Ḍabbī (d. 787), Abū Ḥasan ‘Alī al-Kisā’ī (d. 804), Abū Zakariyyā al-Farrā’ (761–822), Ya’qūb ibn al-Sikkīt (d. 861), and Abū al-‘Abbās Tha’lāb (815–904)³¹

Third, the Baghdad school sought to reconcile the differences between the rational Basrah school and the sociologically oriented Kufa school by integrating elements of both. This school combined strict and flexible linguistic rules into a more dynamic system. The leading figure of the Baghdad school was Ibn Qutaybah (828–889).³² Gardet (1904–1986) and Anawati (1905–1994) note that the early debates between the Kufa and Basrah schools focused on issues such as vocabulary, the differentiation of subjects, objects, and adverbs in grammar (naḥw), and the rules of word formation (ṣarf). These debates were linked to principles of rational reasoning and the logical structures inherent in language. The application of such rational principles in linguistic analysis marked the inception of rational thought within the Islamic tradition.³³

Figure 3: Language schools of thought



2.2 Rationalism of *Fiqh* and Theology

Another factor that fostered the rise of rationalism in Islam was the study of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and theology (*kalām*). Islamic jurisprudence developed several methods that encouraged rational thinking:

- (1) The use of *ta'wīl*: Jurists employed *ta'wīl* to interpret verses that were difficult to understand literally. Although applied cautiously and within limits, this method required deep reflection, as it sought to uncover meanings beyond the apparent text.
- (2) Distinguishing between terms with multiple meanings (*mushtarak*) and those with a single meaning: This approach demanded even more sophisticated philosophical reasoning than *ta'wīl*, as scholars had to analyse language and context carefully to derive precise understanding.

(3) The use of analogy (qiyās): Jurists applied analogy to address issues not explicitly resolved in the Qur’ān. For example, they debated whether the prohibition on hoarding gold and silver (al-Tawbah, 34) extends to gemstones and other valuables, or whether terms like “believer” and “Muslim” include women and enslaved individuals.³⁴

In the study of theology (kalām), Islamic rationalism emerged from the efforts of Muslim theologians to reconcile contradictory and complex concepts into coherent metaphysical frameworks. For instance, they sought to harmonise Allah’s justice with His omniscience, addressing how God can be just while knowing all human actions, including obedience and transgression, and administering reward or punishment accordingly. Similarly, theologians grappled with the use of anthropomorphic language in the Qur’ān—such as references to Allah’s “hands” or “feet”—while maintaining the belief that God is utterly unlike human beings³⁵

These intellectual demands intensified when Muslims became engaged in the religious polemics between Christians and Magians in Damascus. During the Umayyad Caliphate (661–750), Damascus, as the capital, was a centre of theological debate, particularly concerning the nature of good and evil. With the arrival of Muslims,

three parties were involved in these discussions. Gardet (1904–1986) notes that Muslims and Christians debated two central issues.

1. Human freedom and divine determinism: This issue concerns the rational justification of retribution for human actions. If humans possess free will, they are accountable and deserve recompense for their deeds. However, how can this freedom be reconciled with the omnipotence of God, who determines all events, including human actions? If God controls everything, then human beings are not free to choose their actions. If humans lack freedom, it becomes problematic to justify reward or punishment for actions that are not the result of their own volition.
2. The Qur'ān: created or uncreated: This question arises from the Muslim belief that the Qur'ān is the word of Allah (kalām Allāh), paralleling the description of Jesus as the word of Allah. The issue is whether the Qur'ān is created (ḥādīth) or uncreated (qadīm). This distinction carries significant theological implications. If the Qur'ān is uncreated (qadīm), then Jesus, as the word of Allah, would also be uncreated, which could be interpreted in support of the Christian belief in the divinity of Jesus. Conversely, if the Qur'ān is created (ḥādīth), then prior to its revelation, Allah would be considered without words, or the claim of the Quraysh that the Qur'ān was merely the composition of the Prophet Muhammad gains plausibility.³⁶

Such polemics compelled early Muslim intellectuals, particularly theologians, to engage in rational and philosophical thinking. Oliver Leaman (b. 1950) observes that the analytical methods employed by Muslim theologians to address these theological problems were comparable to the Greek philosophical model. In other words, Muslim thinkers developed reasoned and philosophical responses to these issues even before they were exposed to Greek philosophy through translations.³⁷

Discussion

This section elaborates on the findings presented above, beginning with the period of translation of Greek philosophy into Islamic Arabic, specifically during the reign of Caliph al-Ma'mūn (811–833). This period provides crucial and indisputable evidence that Greek philosophy entered Islamic Arabic at a relatively late stage. By this time, the development of Arabic based on logical reasoning was already well established, and Arabic had been the official language of the state since the Umayyad Caliphate (661–750). Moreover, the rational theological framework of the Mu'tazila had been firmly established and had even become the official state doctrine. Consequently, from a historical perspective, it was not Greek philosophy that shaped Islamic thought; rather, the pre-existing Islamic rationalism created the conditions that allowed

Greek philosophy to be incorporated into the Islamic intellectual tradition.³⁸

Second, regarding the development of Greek philosophy within the Islamic intellectual tradition: Historically, its influence spans from al-Kindī (801–873) to Ibn Rushd (1126–1198), indicating that Greek philosophy was active in Islamic thought for only about four centuries. This period must be further reduced when considering times during which Greek philosophy was explicitly rejected or criticised by Muslim thinkers such as Ibn Ḥanbal (780–855), al-Ghazālī (1058–1111), and Ibn Taymiyyah (1263–1328). Compared with the broader trajectory of Islamic intellectual development—from the 7th century until the decline of Islamic scholarship in the 17th century, following thinkers like Mullā Ṣadrā (1571–1635), often regarded as the “third teacher” of Islamic thought—Greek philosophy occupied only a relatively brief segment. In other words, its presence represents a minor chapter within the long history of Islamic rational thought.³⁹

Third, regarding the central theme of this study: The analysis above demonstrates clear distinctions between Greek and Islamic philosophy in terms of subject matter, methods, and objectives. Consequently, it is difficult to support claims, such as those made by Ernest Renan (1823–1892) and Leon Gauthier (1862–1949), that

Islamic philosophy is merely a plagiarism of Greek philosophy. While Greek philosophy may have inspired aspects of Islamic philosophical development, Islamic philosophers adapted and transformed these ideas within the framework of Islamic teachings. A key feature of Islamic philosophy is the integration of rational reasoning with revelation and religious principles. Thinkers from al-Kindī (801–873) and al-Farabi (870–950) to Ibn Rushd (1126–1198) exemplified this integration. Soleh’s research highlights the essential aspects of Ibn Rushd’s synthesis of religion and philosophy, which gave rise to uniquely Islamic intellectual contributions.⁴⁰ Today, this spirit and method of integrating reason with revelation continue to inspire contemporary Muslim thinkers. For instance, Raji al-Faruqi (1921–1986) and Naguib al-Attas (b. 1931) developed the concept of the Islamization of science, Nidhal Guessoum (b. 1961) introduced the idea of “Quantum Islam,” and Soleh (b. 1968) advanced the notion of quantum integration.⁴¹

Fourth, the evidence indicates that Islamic rationalism originates from Islam itself, rather than from Greece—specifically from Arabic logic, the rational methods of deriving Islamic law, and theological thought. Regarding linguistic logic, Soleh’s research demonstrates that the development of early Arabic in Kufa, Basrah, and Baghdad laid the foundations for rational thought in Islam. Linguists such as al-Farāhīdī (718–791) and Sibawayh (760–796) applied logical

principles to establish rules of syntax (naḥw) and word formation (ṣarf). Simultaneously, scholars of Islamic jurisprudence, including Abū Ḥanīfah (699–767) and al-Shāfi‘ī (767–820), developed legal methodologies using concepts such as istiḥsān, istiḥāb, and qiyās, all of which relied on deep rational reasoning. Gardet (1904–1986) observes that the application of logical reasoning in legal methodology played a crucial role in the emergence and development of rational thought within Islamic intellectual history.⁴²

Meanwhile, the polemics and theological debates between Muslim and non-Muslim scholars in Damascus required rigorous rational analysis and the development of systematic methods. Abd al-Rāziq noted that these rational theological discussions played a significant role in the advancement of rational thought in Islam. Consequently, Islamic rationalism emerges from within the Islamic tradition itself, grounded in the rationalisation of language, the methodological reasoning of Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh), and theological debate.

Conclusions

Based on the discussion above, the researcher draws the following conclusions:

First, Islamic rationalism does not originate from Greece and cannot be considered a plagiarism of Greek thought, for three reasons: (a) Historically, Greek rationalist ideas entered the Islamic tradition

through translations during the reign of Caliph al-Ma'mūn (813–833). By this time, the rational theological thought of the Mu'tazila had already been established and had become the official state doctrine. (b) Not all Muslim groups accepted Greek philosophical thought. At various points, prominent figures such as Ibn Ḥanbal (780–855) from the Salaf, al-Ghazālī (1058–1111) from the theologian and philosopher group, and Ibn Taymiyyah (1263–1328) from the school of Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh) rejected and criticized Greek philosophy. (c) Muslim philosophers developed ideas that diverged from Greek philosophy in terms of subject matter, methods of reasoning, and the objectives of philosophical inquiry.

Second Islamic rationalism originates from Islam itself, as evidenced by three main sources: (a) The rationalisation of the early Arabic language: This includes the logical regulation of sentence structures (nahw) and the rules of word formation (ṣarf) in Arabic. (b) The development of methods for determining Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh): Prominent jurists formulated legal methodologies using rational reasoning, including techniques such as istiḥsān, istiṣḥāb, and qiyās. (c) The rationalisation of Mu'tazila theology: Muslim theologians applied reasoned analysis to address and resolve theological debates with non-Muslims.

Based on these findings, this study rejects the conclusions of Ernest Renan (1823–1892) and Leon Gauthier (1862–1949), who claimed that Islam lacks rationality and that Islamic philosophy is a plagiarism of Greek thought. The researcher argues that the assertions of these two French orientalist are unfounded, reflecting a misunderstanding of both the historical development and the rational intellectual tradition within Islam.

Endnotes

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- ¹ Ibrahim Madkur, *Fi Al-Falsafah Al-Islâmiyah: Manhaj Wa Tathbîquh* (Mesir: Dar al-Ma'arif, n.d.). 21.
- ² Louis Gardet and George Anawati, *Falsafah Al-Fikr Al-Diny* (Beirut: Dar al-ilm, 1967). II/ 77; M Abed al- Jabiri, *Takwîn Al'Aql Al-'Arabî* (Beirut: al-Markaz al-Tsaqafi, 1991). 57; Oliver Leaman, *Pengantar Filsafat Islam*, ed. M. Amin Abdullah (Jakarta: Rajawali Press, 1988). 8.
- ³ Annemarie Van Sandwijk, "Ernest Renan (1823-1892): An Orientalist View of Islam," *Tijdschrift Voor Theologie* 51, no. 3 (2011): 259–76.
- ⁴ John Marenbon, "Ernest Renan and Averroism: The Story of a Misinterpretation," in *Renaissance Averroism and Its Aftermath: Arabic Philosophy in Early Modern Europe*, vol. 211 (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 2013), 273–83, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-5240-5_14.
- ⁵ Mohamed Othman, "Islam and Positive Orientalism In the Age of Ideology Ernest Renan as an Example," *LOGOS* 6, no. 6 (February 1, 2010): 9–51, <https://doi.org/10.21608/logos.2021.151147>.
- ⁶ George Sarton, "Ibn Rochd (Averroès) . Léon Gauthier," *Isis* 41, no. 1 (March 1950): 104–6, <https://doi.org/10.1086/349112>.
- ⁷ George Sarton, "Hayy Ben Yaqdhân, Roman Philosophique d'Ibn Thofaïl. Léon Gauthier," *Isis* 30, no. 1 (February 1939): 100–103, <https://doi.org/10.1086/347494>.
- ⁸ George Sarton, "Antécédents Gréco-Arabes de La Psychophysique . Léon Gauthier," *Isis* 32, no. 1 (July 1940): 136–38, <https://doi.org/10.1086/347649>.
- ⁹ Gardet and Anawati, *Falsafah Al-Fikr Al-Diny*. 62.
- ¹⁰ Achmad Khudori Soleh, "Mencermati Sejarah Perkembangan Filsafat Islam (Examining the History of the Development of Islamic Philosophy)," *TSAQAFAH* 10, no. 1 (2014): 63–84, <https://doi.org/10.21111/tsaqafah.v10i1.64>.

- ¹¹ Jabiri, *Takwîn Al'Aql Al-'Arabî*.
- ¹² Hasymi, *Sejarah Kebudayaan Islam* (Jakarta: Bulan Bintang, 1975). 227.
- ¹³ Robert G. Turner, "Double Checking the Cross-Check Principle," *Journal of the American Academy of Audiology* 14, no. 05 (May 2003): 269–77, <https://doi.org/10.1055/s-0040-1715737>.
- ¹⁴ Gardet and Anawati, *Falsafah Al-Fikr Al-Diny*.; Jabiri, *Takwîn Al'Aql Al-'Arabî*.; Leaman, *Pengantar Filsafat Islam*.
- ¹⁵ Achmad Khudori Soleh, *Filsafat Islam Dari Klasik Hingga Kontemporer (Islamic Philosophy from Classical to Contemporary)* (Yogyakarta: Ar-Ruzz Media, 2016).
- ¹⁶ Soleh.
- ¹⁷ Watt, *Islamic Theology and Philosophy*. 41.
- ¹⁸ George N Atiyeh, *Al-Kindi Tokoh Filosof Muslim*, ed. Kasidjo Djojosuwarno (translit from English to Indonesian) (Bandung: Pustaka, 1983). 4.
- ¹⁹ Hossein Nasr, *Three Muslim Sages: Al-Farabi, Ibn Sina and Ibn Arabi* (New York: Caravan Books, 1997). 7.
- ²⁰ Madkur, *Fi Al-Falsafah Al-Islâmiyah: Manhaj Wa Tathbîquh*. 86.
- ²¹ Abd Rahman Badawi, "Muhammad Ibn Zakaria Al-Razi," in *A History of Muslim Philosophy*, ed. MM Sharif, I (New Delhi: Low Price Publication, 1995), 434–49.
- ²² Abu Hamid al- Ghazali, *Tahâfut Al-Falâsifah*, ed. Sulaiman Dunya (Cairo: Dar al-Ma'arif, 1972).
- ²³ Abu Hamid al- Ghazali, "Al-Munqidh Min Al-Ḍalâl," in *Majmû'ah Ras il* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1996), 537–85.; Achmad Khudori Soleh, *Toleransi, Kebenaran Dan Kebahagiaan Menurut Al-Ghazali* *The Islamic Quarterly: Vol 69, No.3-407*

(*Tolerance, Truth and Happiness According to Al-Ghazali*), ed. Erik Sabti Rahmawati (Malang: UIN Malang Press, 2022).

²⁴ Taqiy al-Din ibn Abd Halim Ibn Taymiyah, *Al-Fatāwā* (Cairo: Dar al-Kutub, 1971). IX/ 260.

²⁵ Simon Blackburn, *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press (OUP), 2008).

²⁶ Achmad Khudori Soleh and Erik Sabti Rahmawati, “The Strength of Ibn Rushd’s Integration of Religion and Philosophy: An Islamic Historical Discourse,” *Journal of Al-Tamaddun* 18, no. 2 (2023): 173–87, <https://doi.org/10.22452/JAT.vol18no2.12>.

²⁷ Aristotle, *The Ethic of Aristotle*, ed. JAK Thomson (London: Pinguin Book, 1961).

²⁸ Abu Nasr al- Farabi, “Tahsîl Al-Sa`âdah” (The Attainment of Happiness),” in *Alfarabi’s Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle*, ed. Muhsin Mahdi (USA: The Free Press of Glence, 1962), 13–52.

²⁹ Gardet and Anawati, *Falsafah Al-Fikr Al-Diny*. I, 68.

³⁰ Gardet and Anawati. 70

³¹ Gardet and Anawati. 71.

³² Gardet and Anawati.

³³ Gardet and Anawati.

³⁴ Gardet and Anawati. 73.

³⁵ Soleh, *Filsafat Islam Dari Klasik Hingga Kontemporer (Islamic Philosophy from Classical to Contemporary)*. 29.

³⁶ Gardet and Anawati, *Falsafah Al-Fikr Al-Diny*. 60-63.

³⁷ Leaman, *Pengantar Filsafat Islam*. 10.

- ³⁸ Soleh, “Mencermati Sejarah Perkembangan Filsafat Islam (Examining the History of the Development of Islamic Philosophy).”
- ³⁹ Soleh, *Filsafat Islam Dari Klasik Hingga Kontemporer (Islamic Philosophy from Classical to Contemporary)*.
- ⁴⁰ Soleh and Rahmawati, “The Strength of Ibn Rushd’s Integration of Religion and Philosophy: An Islamic Historical Discourse.”
- ⁴¹ Achmad Khudori Soleh, “Quantum Integration Model for Religion and Science,” *Afkar* 25, no. 2 (2023): 257–90, <https://doi.org/10.22452/afkar.vol25no2.8>.
- ⁴² Achmad Khudori Soleh, “Rasionalisme Islam Berawal Dari Bahasa (Islamic Rationalism Begins with Language),” *LiNGUA: Jurnal Ilmu Bahasa Dan Sastra* 2, no. 1 (2007): 11–25, <https://doi.org/10.18860/ling.v2i1.554>.

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